



NOAA, NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE, WEATHER FORECAST OFFICE

Miami, Florida 33165

<http://weather.gov/southflorida>

Spring is Rip Current and Wildfire Season

The longer and warmer days of March and April are often accompanied by periods of strong and gusty winds. In fact, spring in South Florida is typically the windiest time of the year. This provides the ideal set-up for rip currents and wildfires in what is normally a pleasant time of year for residents and visitors to South Florida.

Rip currents are South Florida's deadliest weather-related hazard. Since 1979, a total of 236 deaths have been attributed to this phenomenon, more than tropical cyclones and lightning combined (Figure 1). Although rip currents can and do occur year-round, often during fair weather, the six-month period from March to August is statistically the most dangerous time of year. In the past five years alone, almost three-quarters of all rip current deaths occurred between March and August (Figure 2). The combination of spring break and summer vacation along with weather factors such as warmer air and surf temperatures and moderate to strong onshore breezes are likely factors for the increased rip current casualties during this six-month period.

Now that the beginning of the deadliest period for rip currents has arrived, here are some recommended tips to keep people safe from these fair weather killers:

- Monitor the latest Rip Current forecasts and statements from the National Weather Service via NOAA Weather Radio and the Internet, as well as through local media sources. Make sure to check the surf conditions before heading to the beach.
- Know how to swim and don't swim alone.
- Always swim at a guarded beach. Since 2005, between 70 and 80 percent of all South Florida rip current-related deaths took place at unguarded beaches. Heed the advice of lifeguards and pay attention to warning flags posted at lifeguard stands and at beach access points.

- If caught in a rip current, don't panic or try to swim directly against the current. Instead, swim sideways until out of the current. If escaping the current is not possible, float or tread water until freed from the rip current, then swim safely back to the beach. Call or wave to get the attention of lifeguards or other rescue personnel at the beach.

For more information on rip currents and rip current safety, please visit the National Weather Service in Miami website at [weather.gov/southflorida](https://www.weather.gov/southflorida), as well as the National Weather Service's Rip Current Awareness site at [ripcurrents.noaa.gov](https://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov).

The dry South Florida winter sets the stage for wildfires during the warmer and windier spring months. This particular winter was exceptionally dry and the outlook through April is for a continuation of drier than normal conditions across our region. Therefore, a heightened risk of wildfires will persist for the next several weeks or even months. Wildfires are a significant hazard in rural communities and in communities near the urban-wildland interface. These areas are particularly vulnerable to the rapid spread of wildfires. Even in metropolitan areas, smoke from distant wildfires can impact air quality and be hazardous to people vulnerable to respiratory conditions.

It is critical to practice wildfire prevention and safety by following these simple tips:

- Follow the advice of forestry and fire safety officials to avoid causing wildfires.
- Many South Florida wildfires are the result of human activities. Be careful when discarding cigarettes, matches and barbecue coals and don't park vehicle in high grass where a hot catalytic converter or tailpipe can start a fire.

When conditions are conducive for the rapid spread of wildfires, the National Weather Service issues Fire Danger Statements, Fire Weather Watches and Red Flag Warnings which indicate the location and time of the greatest threat.

Please visit the National Weather Service website at [weather.gov/southflorida](https://www.weather.gov/southflorida) for the latest fire weather forecasts. You can also visit the [Florida Division of Forestry web site](https://www.forestfla.com) for more information on fire weather forecasts and wildfire prevention.

Weather-Related Deaths Since 1979

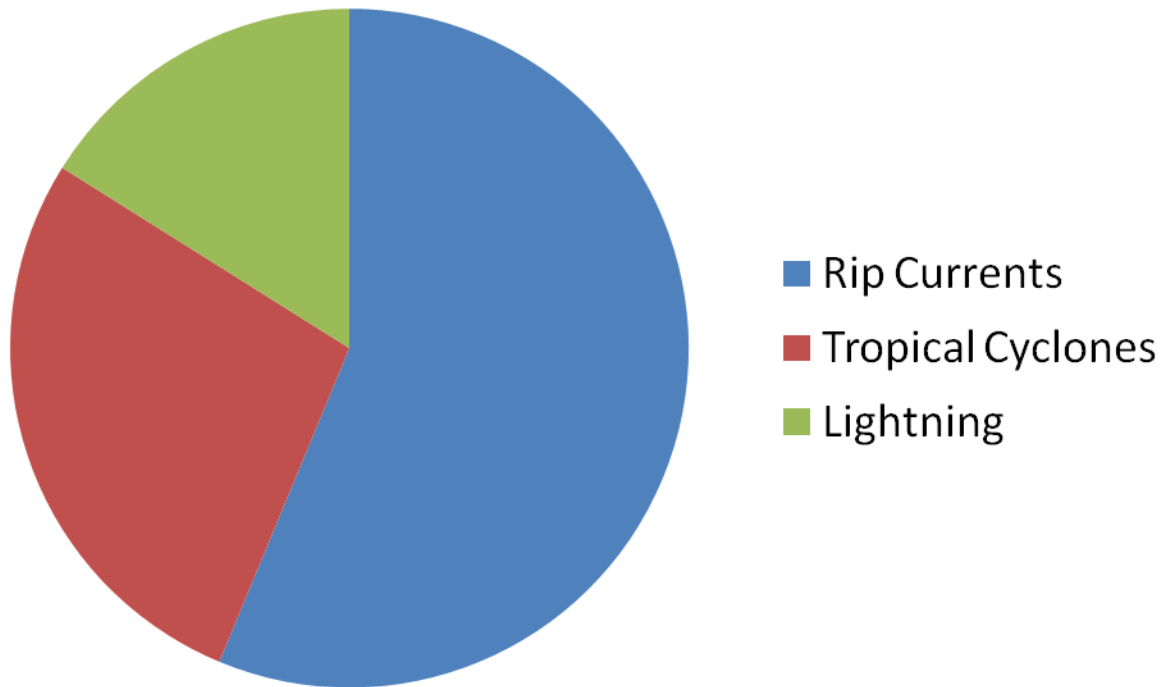


Figure 1: Weather-related deaths in mainland South Florida since 1979.

Note: totals for tropical cyclones include direct and indirect deaths.

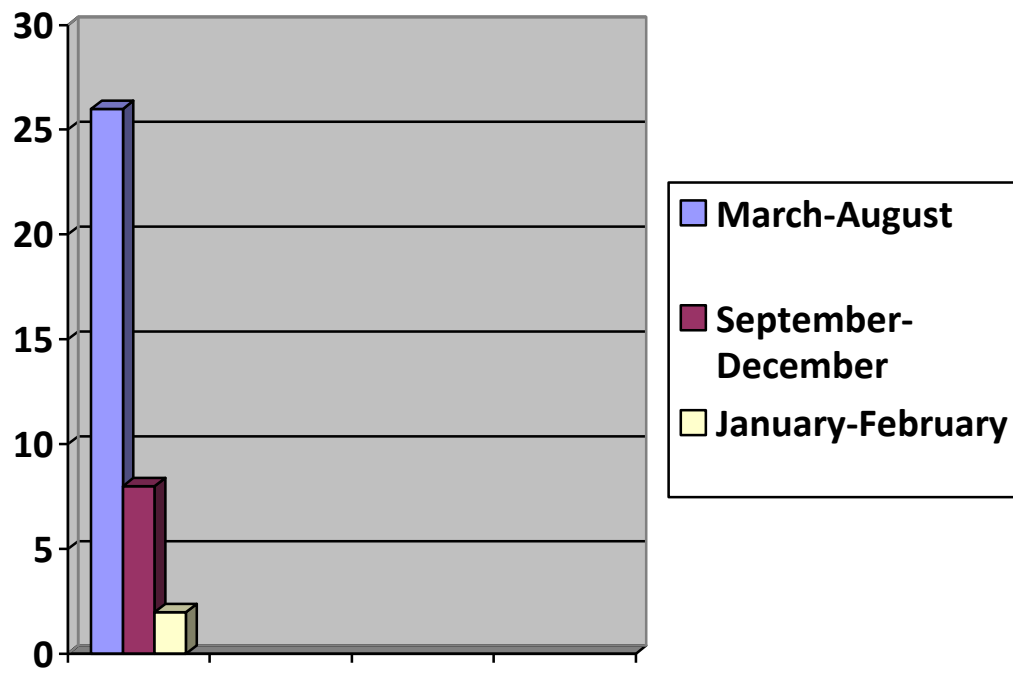


Figure 2: Reported rip current deaths at South Florida beaches since 2005.